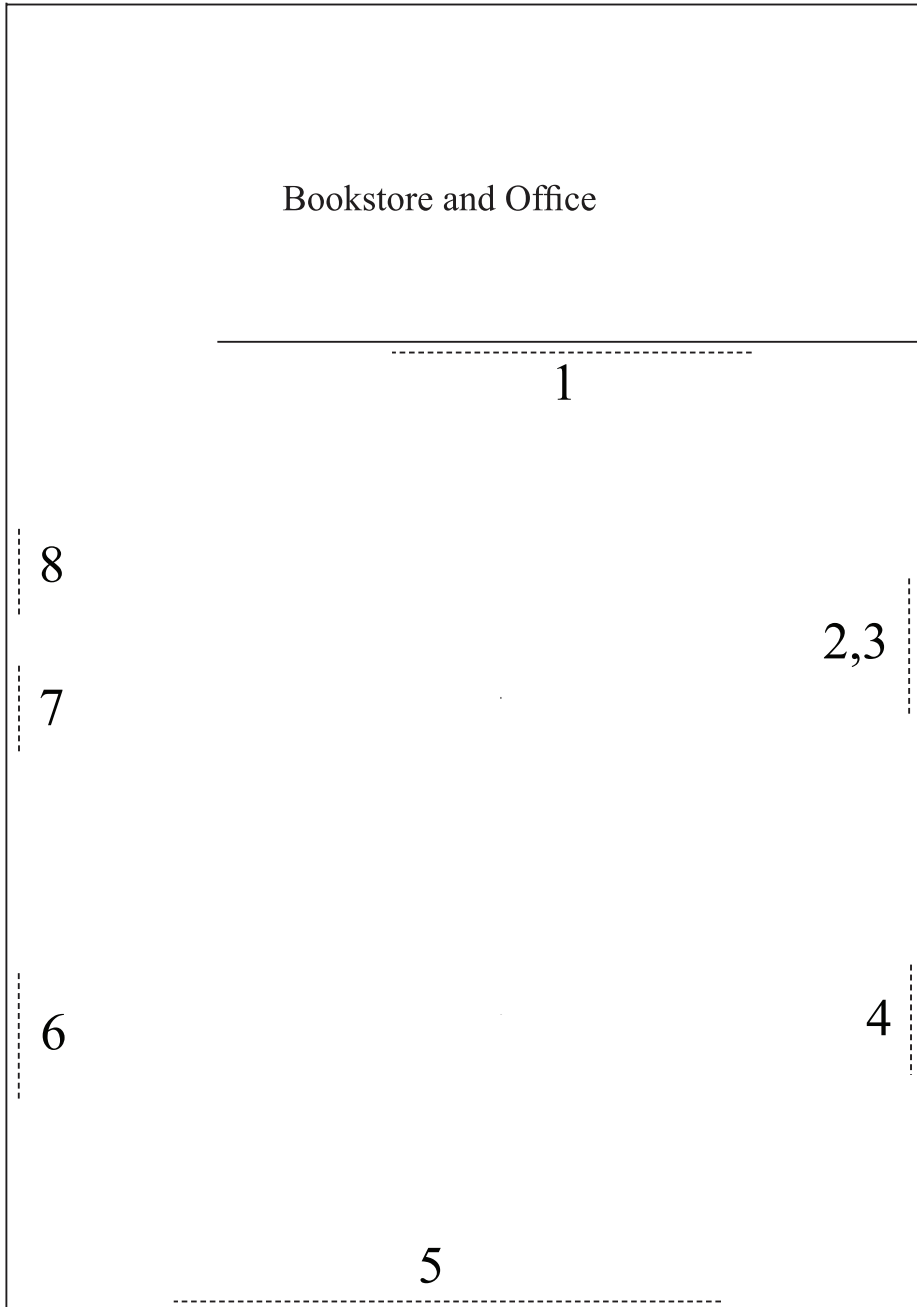


**Sinking Feeling:
Eddie Arroyo,
Claudio Nolasco,
Jamilah Sabur, Erin
Thurlow & Antonia
Wright**

**Curated by Heather
Diack**

**March 2 – April 29th,
2023**

Or Gallery



- 1 Antonia Wright
And so with ends comes beginnings, 2019
HD video, 4:30 min. Audio score written by Jason Ajemian.
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami.
- 2 Jamilah Sabur
rhombus: cradling Mars west of the Sargasso Sea, 2017
Digital video, color, sound, 1:50 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London.
- 3 Jamilah Sabur
The Harvesters, 2022
4k video, color, sound, 8:27 min.
Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London.
- 4 Eddie Arroyo
Floats, 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 34" x 30"
Courtesy of the artist and Spinello Projects, Miami.
- 5 Erin Thurlow
NONEWSHOW, NONEWSNOW, 2021
Newspaper broadsheets with paint and archival tape, 2 panels,
each 66" x 66"
Courtesy of the artist.
- 6 Claudio Nolasco
Truck tire, South Miami, Florida, 2022
Archival ink jet print [framed], 32 1/8" x 40 1/8"
Courtesy of the artist.
- 7 Claudio Nolasco
New construction, South Miami, Florida, 2022
Archival ink jet print [framed], 24 1/8" x 32 1/8"
Courtesy of the artist.
- 8 Claudio Nolasco
Lighthouse Point, Key Biscayne, Florida, 2022
Archival ink jet print [framed], 24 1/8" x 32 1/8"
Courtesy of the artist.

Sinking Feeling
By Heather Diack

In synch with rising sea-levels artists are increasingly attuned to the sinking feeling of climate catastrophe. For the many millions of people who live in dense coastal cities like Mumbai, Amsterdam, São Paulo, Venice, New York, Guangzhou, and Vancouver, water occupies a paradoxical status—at once a means of survival and a source of potential demise.

In this respect, Miami, with all its extremes and idiosyncrasies, is a harbinger for coastal cities worldwide. The details may be local, but the implications are global.

Designated within North America as “Ground Zero” for the impending peril it faces from warming waters and flooding, water surrounding the metropolis of Miami is projected to surge two feet in less than

forty years. Sinking Feeling includes work by five Miami artists who tap into this ominous pulse, which, in a cynical twist, coincides with being named the most unaffordable city in the United States. This gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America, popularly dubbed the “Magic City,” is pitched as an ever-expanding touristic tropical paradise, incessant skyscrapers erected, even as the drenching effects of global warming loom.

The poetic and poignant artworks included in this exhibition hone-in on the inseparability of the actualities of the climate crisis from everyday lived realities and formative histories, drawing parallels to the increasing vulnerabilities of other coastal cities. In this way, the artworks in Sinking Feeling are as much about immersion and reflection as creating a rising tide of interconnected awareness and environmental justice.

As the world warms, glaciers melt, ocean water expands, sea levels rise, and storms intensify. The water is coming, the extinction threat is real.

And nevertheless, more than 22 million people relocated to Florida between July 2021 and July 2022, making it the fastest growing state in the US according to a Census Bureau report.¹ Water seeps in from all sides in Miami, through the oolite ground, from the sea, from the swamp, from the sky. Indeed, as journalist Mario Alejandro Ariza has persuasively argued, “few major US cities stand to lose as much, as soon, as Miami.”² In view of this precarity, of tidal flooding, failing septic systems, and climate-driven displacement, art has a role to play in conveying the sense of urgency, and potentially of moving us from

**What kind
of future is
conceivable?**

1 “Growth in U.S. Population Shows Early Indication of Recovery Amid COVID-19 Pandemic” U.S. Bureau, December 22, 2022; <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/2022-population-estimates.html>

2 Mario Alejandro Ariza, *Disposable City: Miami’s Future on the Shores on Climate Catastrophe* (Bold Type Books, 2020). See also the PBS series *Sinking Cities* (2018), Episode 4: Miami.

the space of feelings towards the mobilization of action.

What kind of future is conceivable?

Conception itself forms the central focus of Antonia Wright’s video *And so with ends come beginnings* (2019), featuring the artist’s belly at nine months pregnant as the embodiment of a breathing island, rising and falling synchronically until finally it is fully submerged amidst an ascending sea resembling iridescent oil. Certainly, few images are

as politically loaded now than pregnancy. With the June 2022 overturning of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling of 1973 establishing a constitutional right to abortion, reproductive justice and bodily autonomy are at the forefront of political debates. The cruelty of abortion bans is one dimension of this, yet another is the threat climate catastrophe poses to the ethics of childbearing. In view of imminent ecological devastation, people world-over are facing serious, intractable questions over whether to bring children

into the world.³ Wright's elegiac summoning of fecundity in face of fossil-fuel fatalism poignantly brings the realities of *carpe diem* urban development into dialogue with the womb as a site of political struggle.

Accompanied by Jason Ajemian's experimental sound composition and audio from actual labor, Wright insists on persistence. *And so with ends comes beginnings* (2019) is ultimately life-affirming even as anxiety swirls all around. The metallic water calls to mind the violence of extractive capitalism while creating an analogy with the liquid silver that births photography.

In Jamilah Sabur's video piece *rhombus: cradling Mars west of the Sargasso Sea* (2017) the low-lying horizon line of water is so dark as to be nearly imperceptible. And yet, that same water is omnipresent as

the sound of waves lap like rhythmic exhales. Our eyes are drawn upward to the aperture in the dawn sky, towards the piercing distant light which might be easily misread as the moon and is indeed Mars. Tensions and paradoxes abound in this subtle, hypnotic work. The red planet was named after the Roman god of war who was also an agricultural guardian. Such duality in identity, between destruction and renewal, is reflected here too geographically. The Sargasso sea, located in the Atlantic, stands out as the only recognized sea on earth without land boundaries, defined instead by ocean currents alone. Its dynamic borders seem to have an analogy in the rhombus held high by the protagonist, that hard edged quadrilateral whose etymological Greek origins allude to cycles, to orbits, to revolutions, in fact meaning to "turn round and round."

A photograph of latticework from the entryway to Sabur's mother's childhood home in Jamaica, which served as a vent for air and light, inspired the artist's use of the rhombus, a recurring motif in her practice.

This shape is activated by Sabur as both a familial and historical lens, and a re-framing device. When Sabur cradles Mars with her rhombus above her silhouetted head, teetering subtly with the flow of the tides, it becomes an interplanetary portal.

Sabur's *The Harvesters* (2022) references the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1565 painting by the same name, from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (once New Amsterdam). This landscape painting depicts workers reaping in the wheat fields, carrying bushels to the village, climbing a tree for pears, taking a break from their labour to eat lunch, all in the tangibly rendered late summer heat. The scene moves in parts across various recessive plains, and in the distance merchant trade ships in the harbour can be glimpsed.

In Sabur's take, *The Harvesters* moves between oversea and subaquatic, navigating geology, climatology, and porous waterways. Among panoramas of the horseback riders in the surf and a Russian ice breaker plowing a frozen tundra, the artist appears dressed as cricket player moving elegantly, rhythmically. Her face is obscured with a gauzy mask, a choice explained by Sabur: "It allows me to be more present in the gesture, fully sinking into a ritual state where I rely on my haptic perception."⁴ Diptych scenes of mineral extraction recall Victorian stereoscope vision and chondrocladia (a carnivorous deep sea sponge with branches that end in inflatable spheres, believed to have been in existence for over two million years) relays the sense and internal pressure of holding one's breath underwater. As artwriter Monica Uszerowicz has beautifully articulated, Sabur "slides down escarpment into the sea, into a bedrock

3 Emma Green, "A World Without Children," *The Atlantic*, September 20, 2021.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/09/millennials-babies-climate-change/620032/>

4 Sabur quoted in Mark Jenkins, "This artist is inspired by landscape, whether terrestrial, cosmic or internal," *The Washington Post*, November 4, 2020.

of histories and populations terrorized, colonized, reshaped, bordered, whitened.”⁵

Much of Sabur’s art practice revolves around meditations on spaces underwater, as spaces with memory, as passages of interconnection. Not coincidentally, Sabur changed her middle name to Ibine-Ela-Acu, which in Timucua means Water Sun Moon. Timucua is an indigenous language that has been extinct for four hundred years, from the territory of St. Augustine, Florida, which became the first colonized city in what is now called the United States.

Language, its transmission and its opacity, is also central to Erin Thurlow’s *NONEWSNOW NONEWSHOW* (2021). Featuring white spray paint atop *El Nuevo Herald*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times* broadsheet

5 See “Water as Memory and Dreams: Jamilah Sabur Interviewed by Monica Uszerowicz,” BOMB, November 28, 2018. <https://bomb-magazine.org/articles/water-as-memory-and-dreams-jamilah-sabur-interviewed/>

pages, the chosen medium speaks to ephemerality and the passage of time. The news cycles through geo-politics, business and financial analysis, sports, the arts section, and the shifting terms of global crises, which across *NONEWSNOW*, *NONEWSHOW* alternates between English and Spanish reportage. The overlaying snow-hued letters may not be immediately discernable. And then, once detected, there they are, graphically honed to the geometry to the newspaper page: *NONEWSNOW*, *NONEWSHOW*.

The piece couples a denial of anything “new” with the newspapers’ sensational statements to the opposite effect. Alluding to the growing absence of snow globally, yet another link in the atmospheric water cycle, the greying pages in Thurlow’s piece recall the slush of childhood memories. While forecasts of future no-snow winters⁶ might feel

6 Angelica Pizza, “Scientists say a winter without snow could be possible by 2040,” January 5, 2022; <https://brightly.eco/blog/scientists-warn-winter-without-snow-is-coming>

incredulous after a storm cycle wreaks havoc, it is indeed the case that the intensity of blizzards paradoxically signals the vanishing of winter as it has been known. Contradiction seeps in other ways as well, as *NONEWSNOW*, *NONEWSHOW* embeds “no news now, no news how;” in other words, a tacit and poignant questioning of our wider relationship to media and the expectations placed on journalism. At once a disavowal of things as they are and a questioning of how we arrived at this deteriorating situation, the hard edges of *NONEWSNOW*, *NONEWSHOW* ironically mark our entry into a melting world.

Eddie Arroyo’s painting, *Floats* (2020) offers a metaphor for, and the materialization of, illusion, namely, a guiding force in the construction of daily reality in Miami. The name of the sunglasses shop is too good to be true, too fitting, too ironic: *Floats*. Connoting airy suspension, lightness, buoyancy on the water, the name signals a fantasy bound touristic reverie. Perfectly Miami. While there is no actual water pictured, its spectre is nevertheless here,

detectable in the verb floats, in the leaden sea blue sky which envelopes the diminutive building from above, sensed in the compressed space created by the push of the whitewashed building on the left.

The evocation of sunglasses, a stylish screen to block the rays, thwarts us with the opacity of the windowpanes—where one might expect transparency, we are met instead with impenetrability, nowhere to see or go beyond the thickness of murky yellow paint and the flat geometric delineation of black lines. Arroyo is a skilled painter, with no intention of allowing us to escape into the window of his work. This is not a daydream. Rather he confronts us with the facts of paint on canvas as artifice, an artifice that compels visually even as it denounces the false promises of the spaces it pictures.

Arroyo lives and works in Little Haiti, an historic neighborhood of Haitian exiles, predominantly lower-income Afro-Caribbean residents, undergoing rapid gentrification. As an activist and a trenchant observer of the urban landscape his work is frequently

focused on changes in this neighborhood, and others like it in Miami such as Allapatah, Overtown, and Liberty City. This gentrification is in part climate-driven because Little Haiti sits at approximately ten feet above sea level, making it attractive to investors seeking higher ground and wealthy people living on the beach looking for a place to move inland. Luxury high-rise apartments and high-ends stores continue to encroach, effacing existing communities.

The search for higher ground is a literal and figurative motif in Claudio Nolasco's photographs from his series *Miami-Dade*. In the pairing of *New construction, South Miami, Florida* (2022) with *Lighthouse Point, Key Biscayne, Florida* (2022) the nonexistent water line on an empty pool confounds ideals of pleasurable escape with the historic site of the Cape Florida house, Key Biscayne, Miami, an access point to the "Saltwater" Underground Railroad in operation between 1821-1861, an escape route from

No matter how one feels about it, the water *is* coming.

enslavement in the Southern states to the British-controlled Bahamas.

In another instance, a massive truck tire dominates one large vertically oriented color print (namely *Truck Tire, South Miami, Florida*, 2022), its heavy treads balanced atop the precarious edge of a sidewalk curb. The vehicle staking claim to the sidewalk tells us something about the relationship between drivers and

pedestrians in this town and moreover about an overriding, reckless sense of entitlement. There's humour however in noticing the small puddle the fossil-fuel guzzler has successfully evaded, and poetic sorrow as that same water trails without

interruption into the distance, no end in sight. The follies and fictions of finding elevation summed up by this photograph assert the interconnections between seemingly minuscule choices and the concrete facts of climate crisis.

No matter how one feels about it, the water *is* coming.

Even before questions of civic concern, there is unfortunately a question of belief. In Yale's Climate Opinion Survey⁷ of Miami-Dade County in 2021, only half of Miami residents said they believe global warming will harm them personally – far lower than the 90% in Canada, Western Europe and Japan⁸. Given the role that self-interest often plays in decision-making and action-taking, such denialist logic is itself a force to be reckoned with.

As writer Rebecca Solnit puts it, "climate change *is* violence."⁹ In other words, criminally negligent behaviors

in corporate and governmental practice have enabled environmental destruction, greed-fueled extraction, social irresponsibility, and with that, fatalities to escalate. How we see these crises will determine how we respond, and moreover, whether we align ourselves with scientists and policymakers who push for decarbonization and other forms of climate adaptation and resilience efforts. At a time when every fraction of a degree matters¹⁰, so does every image.

7 Yale Climate Opinion Map, February 23, 2022; <https://climate-communication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/>

8 Tien Ming Lee, Ezra M. Markowitz, Peter D. Howe, Chia-Ying Ko, and Anthony A. Leiserowitz, "Predictors of public climate change awareness and risk perception around the world," *Nature*, 27 July 2015.

9 Rebecca Solnit, "Call Climate Change What It Is: Violence," April 27, 2014; <http://rebeccasolnit.net/essay/call-climate-change-what-it-is-violence/>

10 See António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, Twitter post, January 16, 2022; <https://twitter.com/antonioguterres/status/1482872294884233218>

Biographies

Eddie Arroyo received his BFA in Painting from Florida International University in 2001. Solo exhibitions of his work have been staged at the Bakehouse Art Complex, Swampspace, and the Haitian Heritage Museum. Arroyo has presented at group exhibitions including the Whitney Biennial (2019), CAC New Orleans, Arsenal Contemporary Art New York, the Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, Spinello Projects and the Little Haiti Cultural Complex. In 2018, he was the recipient of the 2018 South Florida Cultural Consortium Visual and Media Artists Fellowship and lectured at New York Academy of Art and Florida International University.

Claudio Nolasco is a Dominican-born photographer currently residing in South Miami, Florida, where he is an assistant professor of photography at the University of Miami. Nolasco holds a Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from The Cooper Union School of Art. He has exhibited at such galleries as Art in General, Torrance Shipman Gallery, the Lipany Gallery at Fordham University, the Philadelphia Photo Arts Center in Philadelphia, PA, and the Miami Dade College Art Gallery in Miami, FL, and recently held an exhibition as part of the Half-King Photo Series in NYC.

Jamilah Sabur is a Jamaican-born artist living and working in Brussels. Recent exhibitions include: The Harvesters, Bass Museum, Miami Beach, FL (2022); Eltanin, Broadway, New York (2022); DADA Holdings, Nina Johnson, Miami (2021); Prospect 5 New Orleans (2021); La montagne fredonne sous l'océan/The mountain sings underwater, Fondation PHI, Momenta Biennale, Montréal (2021); Observations: Selected Works by Jamilah Sabur, University of Maryland Art Gallery (2020); Mending the Sky, New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans (2020); Here Be Dragons, Copperfield, London (2020). Sabur holds a BFA from Maryland Institute College of Art and an MFA from University of California, San Diego.

Erin Thurlow (BFA, San Francisco Art Institute, MFA, Rutgers) lives and works between Qualicum Beach, BC and Miami, FL. Solo exhibitions include Dimensions Variable (Miami) and Mercer Union (Toronto). Group exhibitions include Phraseology at the Bass Museum (Miami Beach), After the Fire at Centre Skol (Montreal), and Heat Island at Smackmellon (Brooklyn). He has received grants and other funding from Miami-Dade Department of Cultural Affairs, Joan Mitchel Foundation, the N.E.A., Ontario Arts Council and Toronto Arts Council. Fellowships and residencies include Banff Center (AB), the Atlantic Center for the Arts (FL), three-walls (IL), and the Millay Colony (NY).

Antonia Wright is a Cuban-American artist born in Miami, Florida. Through a multimedia practice of video, performance, photography, sound, light, and sculpture, Wright responds to extremes of emotion, control, and violence as it relates to systems of power. Her work has been exhibited at the Frist Art Museum, Nashville, TN, Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, The Margulies Collection and the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Wright's work has been published in The New York Times, Artforum, Art in America, Hyperallergic, i-D, New York Magazine, and the Miami Herald.

Heather Diack is Associate Professor of Contemporary Art and History of Photography at the University of Miami. She holds a PhD from the University of Toronto and is a graduate of the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Diack is the author of *Documents of Doubt: The Photographic Conditions of Conceptual Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2020) which was awarded a Photography Network Book Prize (2021) and co-author of *Global Photography: A Critical History* (London: Routledge, 2020), Diack was previously the Terra Foundation Visiting Professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität in Berlin (2016).

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